

Camp Roberts Opera House

By Staff Sgt. Tom Murotake

CAMP Roberts, already known as the place patriotic Hollywood performers would come to entertain troops in training during World War II and the Korean War, now has the distinction of being perhaps the only military base in the United States to have had an opera house. This previously-unknown part of the Camp Roberts story has been rediscovered with the donation of memorabilia from the collection of the late opera impresario, Vladimir Rosing, by his widow Ruth Rosing, to the Camp Roberts Museum. Mrs. Rosing was accompanied by the September presentation by Mathias E. Kelemen, who met Vladimir while training as a soldier at Camp Roberts, later becoming his "right-hand man" as a Production Manager for the Rosing "stage spectaculars" and a Hollywood

agent in his own right. Vladimir, who fled his native Russia rather than live under Communist rule, was hired during World War II by the War Department to be the Director of Camp Presentations for the Camp Roberts Special Services Branch. He produced a number of musical and variety shows for the soldiers training at Camp Roberts, working with Red Skelton, "Camp Roberts' most famous private," and directing numerous other MGM movie personalities allowed to perform as a service to the soldiers by studio founder Louis B. Mayer.

Vladimir stayed true to his "roots" as a world-renown opera tenor, however, and introduced soldiers to the world of opera, a seemingly unlikely draw for men training for war. A master showman as well, he made his operas more interesting for the average G.I. by performing

his productions in English and billing them as "musicals" instead. All of his shows were also known for the large number of women performing in them: as the post newspaper said about Vladimir's first production of the operetta *The Merry Widow*, "... the boys saw a show of girls, beautiful music, comical situations and lots of laughs."

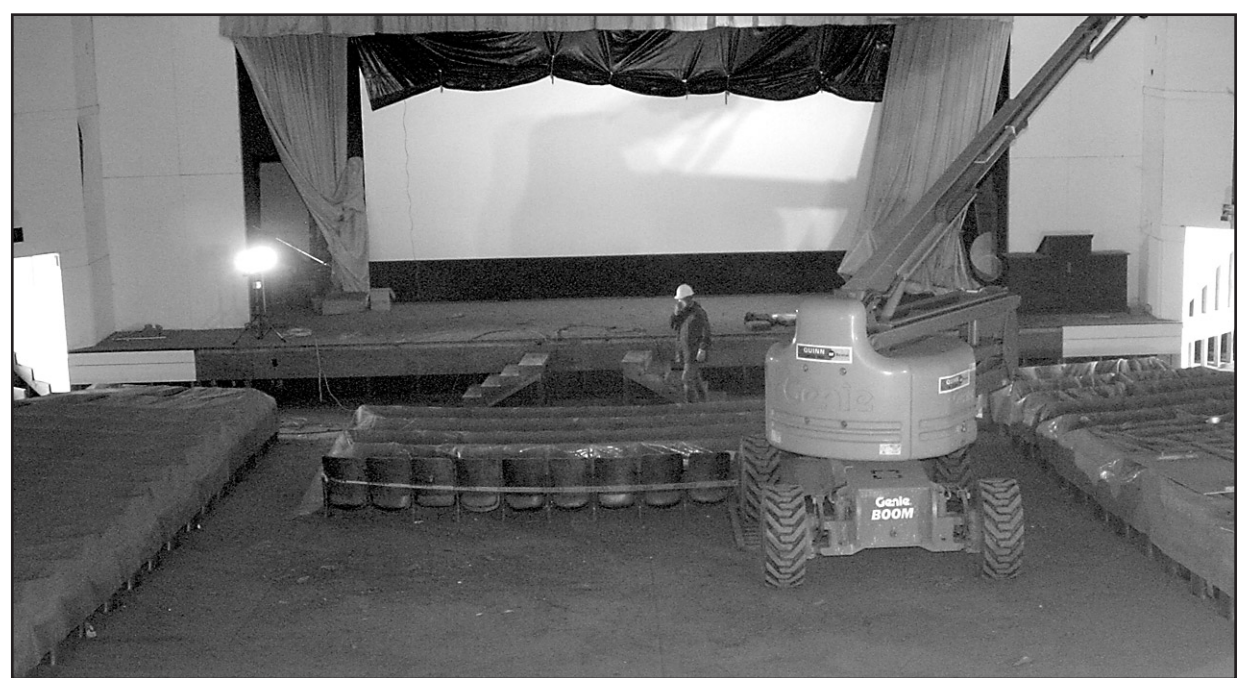
ROSING DONATION

The Rosing donation will become a part of a display recognizing the performers who have entertained soldiers over the years, such as Bob Hope and Jane Russell, now under construction in the Post Museum Annex. The display will also recognize Hollywood personalities, such as Red Skelton, that have trained or served at Camp Roberts: Robert Mitchum, Van Heflin, Bob Newhart, Tom Selleck and Tony Dow and Ken Osmond ("Wally" and "Eddie Haskell" of "Leave It to Beaver" fame).

Camp Roberts' Theater 1, the main post theater that was the site of a number of Rosing's productions and Red Skelton's show stage when he performed here, fell out of

"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility -- I welcome it."

— John F. Kennedy



regular use and subsequently into disrepair with the reduction in the number of soldiers training at the camp in the 1980s. With the increase in soldiers passing through Camp Roberts in support of missions across the nation and around

the world, the theater is presently undergoing renovation for its return to service as a training lecture hall and movie theater. A proposal has been made to name the refurbished facility in honor of Red Skelton.

Historical Museum adds exhibit

Exhibits feature stage and screen stars of the past

By Gary McMaster, Exhibit Director

At the Camp Roberts Museum the all-volunteer staff is always finding interesting tidbits of information on Camp Roberts' history to highlight in new exhibits. Photos and biographical info on some of Camp Roberts' most famous "alumni" — like actors Robert Mitchum and Van Heflin— have been recently added to the video viewing room.

Another recent addition is actor Steve Reeves, Hollywood's "Hercules."

Before becoming "Mr. World" and "Mr. Universe" and then going to to star in many strongman screen epics during the late 50s and 60s, Reeves did his Basic Training and AIT at Camp Roberts during WWII. He was sent

to the Phillipines with his infantry company to fight the Japanese, and was stationed in occupied Japan at war's end.

To enter this new exhibit in the Museum Annex just inside Camp Roberts' main gate, the visitor walks through an entryway flanked with theater drapes with a WWII soldier taking tickets to Red Skelton's "Girl Crazy"—one of the many shows that Mr. Rosing produced at Camp Roberts.

Mrs. Rosing has also offered to donate several hundred copies of the book she wrote on her late husband. Pick up your copy at the Camp Roberts Museum Gift Shop Thursdays and Saturdays from 9-4, or call 238-8288 for more information.



MEMORIES AND RENOVATIONS

ABOVE: Camp Roberts Post Theater 1, home of numerous productions by Val Rosing and stage performances by Red Skelton, "Camp Roberts' Most Famous Private." The theater is currently undergoing renovation for use as a lecture hall and movie theater.

LEFT:Ruth Rosing, widow of Valdimir Rosing, and his one-time "right-hand man," Mathias Kelemen, view materials Rosing donated to the Camp Roberts Museum. (Photos by Franco Federici)

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